

## **Questioned Documents Unit (QDU)**

### **Case Records and Review for Cases in Forensic Advantage (FA)**

#### **1 Scope**

These procedures apply to Questioned Documents Unit (QDU) personnel who generate case records and/or conduct technical and administrative reviews in Forensic Advantage (FA) and supplements the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Assigning Cases and Conducting Examinations* and the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Preparing, Reviewing, and Issuing Laboratory Reports and Retaining Records in Forensic Advantage (FA)*.

#### **2 Case-Related Records**

##### **2.1 Administrative Records**

**2.1.1** Facsimiles, letters, substantive emails, and other correspondence.

**2.1.2** Case Record Report.

**2.1.3** Case Record Communication Log, if applicable.

**2.1.4** Photograph(s)/digital images or equivalent prepared and retained for record purposes. The number of discs containing digital images of record copies will be accounted for on the *Laboratory Division Supporting Documentation Envelope (7-251)* which is in the FBI Laboratory file.

**2.1.5** If an examiner serves as the person managing the case, they will retain the Case Report, Chain-of-Custody Log, Examination Plan (7-262), Case Object Repository, and Case Communication Log within FA.

**2.1.6** Copies of Evidence Analyst (EA) records, if retained in hard copy format.

##### **2.2 Examination Records**

**2.2.1** All case-related work notes/records which support the examiner's conclusion(s) to include:

- Printouts or images from Video Spectral Comparator (VSC), or comparable equipment
- Copies or images of positive indented writing lifts
- Copies of reference materials/standards
- Drawings/Simulations/Images depicting observed characteristics

- Examination photographs
- Examination overlays
- Manufacturer's information/specifications
- Electronic copies of test impressions
- Digital images of evidence

**2.2.2** Case Record Object Repository, where applicable.

**2.3** Administrative and examination records for FA cases will be retained in accordance with procedures in the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Preparing, Reviewing, and Issuing Laboratory Reports and Retaining Records in Forensic Advantage (FA)*.

**2.3.1** Certain instances may warrant the physical retention of documents in the 7-251 only. Such instances include classified emails, letters, or other correspondence. In such instances, reference will be made in the Case Communication Log to refer to the 7-251.

**2.3.2** All hard copies of examination records will be numbered to account for all pages generated in the QDU when processing the requested examinations. The numbering sequence used must account for each page, followed by the total number of pages, using the "Page \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_" or "\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_" format.

**2.3.3** If hard copies of examination records exist, the total pages of examination records generated will be noted on the front of the 7-251. If the examination records only exist electronically, they will be retained in FA and/or Sentinel.

**2.3.4** If hard copies of administrative records are retained, an itemized list of these records (including the number of pages of each) will be accounted for on the front of the 7-251.

**2.4** All the above administrative and examination records will be maintained in the case file, which consists of physical records (if retained) in the 7-251 and electronic records retained in FA and/or Sentinel.

### **3 Case Review**

Questioned document and footwear and tire examinations conducted in the FBI Laboratory and in the field undergo the same review process. All comparisons and database associations are verified, and all cases are technically reviewed by another qualified examiner to ensure accuracy and adherence to established practices and procedures. In addition, the Unit Chief will ensure all cases are administratively reviewed for accuracy and adherence to established practices and procedures.

**3.1** The *QDU-12 LIMS Case Review Evaluation Sheet* (Appendix A) and the *QDU – 15 Abbreviations* (Appendix B) may be referred to as needed when conducting administrative and

technical reviews. Technical reviews, and administrative reviews will be conducted on all forensic cases containing “Results of Examinations”. In addition, all “Results of Examinations” containing comparison results, printing process results, alteration/obliteration results, interpretation of indented writing, database associations, and any other results deemed necessary by the technical reviewer will be verified. Laboratory reports containing “Remarks” only with no results section will only be administratively reviewed.

**3.2** Upon completing a case that contains examination results, the case examiner will submit the case records and report to a technical reviewer. It is the responsibility of the case examiner to ensure that the technical reviewer has not completed any work on the case. Upon receiving the case records and report, the reviewing examiner will complete a technical review and ensure that database associations and other appropriate results, including comparison results, are verified. Other results may also be verified at the discretion of the technical reviewer.

**3.2.1** If corrections are needed, they will be recorded, addressed, and the case will then be resubmitted for review.

**3.2.2** If a technical disagreement arises, the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Resolution of Scientific or Technical Disagreement* will be followed.

**3.2.3** Upon completion of the technical review, the reviewer will record their approval in FA. This indicates the examiner(s) and reviewer(s) are in agreement.

**3.3** Once the technical review and verifications are recorded in FA, or if no technical review is required (e.g., Remarks only), the case examiner will submit the case records and report for administrative review. All cases will be administratively reviewed.

**3.3.1** If corrections are needed, they will be recorded and addressed, and the case will then be resubmitted for review.

**3.3.2** Upon completion of the administrative review, the reviewer will record their approval of the case records in FA, indicating the administrative review has been performed and that the report is administratively accurate.

**3.4** If the case meets the criteria for a blind verification, it will be assigned a blind verifier by the Technical Leader/Blind Verification Coordinator (Qualified Examiner designated to serve in this role if Technical Leader is unavailable). The blind verification will be conducted after the completion of the technical review and verifications and prior to the administrative review. Refer to the *QDU Blind Verification Procedures* for guidance.

**3.5** Once the review processes are completed, approval from both the technical and administrative reviewers has been obtained in FA, and if applicable, a blind verification has been conducted, the report will be uploaded to Sentinel, if appropriate, and issued.

## 4 Dissemination of Expeditious Results

There are instances when the results of an examination(s) need to be expeditiously relayed to the contributor. Prior to a report being issued to the contributor and a technical review being conducted, an examiner may expeditiously disseminate the results or partial results of an examination(s) that is technical in nature only after a verification of those results has been conducted by a verifier. This review of the expedited results will be recorded within FA. The examiner will clearly state to the contributor which examinations were conducted, which items of evidence were examined, the results of the examinations, and that the results are subject to change upon the completion of the final review conducted upon the completion of the casework and issuance of the Laboratory Report. Information not technical in nature may be reported prior to any review. The dissemination of expedited results or other information will be recorded on the *Case Communication Log* by the examiner in accordance with the FBI Laboratory Operations Manual *Preparing Laboratory Reports and Retaining Records in FA*. Technical and administrative reviews will be conducted and recorded in accordance with this procedure prior to the report being issued.

**4.1** The following information is considered technical in nature and will not be provided to the contributor prior to conducting a verification:

- Whether an alteration or tampering of an item is detected
- Interpretation of indented writing
- Results of a database search association
- Printing process(es) used to produce an item
- Whether text is located on an office equipment ribbon
- Authenticity of an item based on reference material
- Dating verification of an item based on reference material
- Any interpretive results

**4.2** The following information may be provided to the contributor prior to conducting a technical review and verification:

- Request for additional known items
- Requests for additional evidence (e.g., digital images of impressions taken prior to casting/lifting).
- Inquiry concerning the known writing (e.g., is the writing dictated or undictated, how was the writing obtained)
- Inquiry of whether the original of a non-original item is available or can be obtained
- Inquiry of whether a better copy of a non-original item is available or can be obtained
- The suitability of an item for comparison (e.g., severely distorted writing, indistinct footwear impression)
- The lack of sufficient comparability of items for comparison (e.g., handwritten entries to be compared to hand printed entries)
- Suggestion of additional examinations that may be probative

- Notification that a requested examination cannot or will not be conducted
- Request for consent to submit an item to a facilitating laboratory
- **Redacted**

## 5 References

*FBI Laboratory Operations Manual*

*FBI Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual*

*QDU Quality Assurance Manual*

*QDU Standard Operating Procedures Manual*

Rev. #	Issue Date	History
4	02/03/20	In section 3.1 changed “search results” to “associations”. Added “It is the responsibility of the case examiner to ensure that the technical reviewer has not completed any work on the case. An alternate reviewer should be selected if the primary reviewer has completed any work.” to section 3.2. Also changed “...database associations and all other comparison results are verified.” of section 3.2 to “...database associations and other appropriate results, including comparison results, are verified.” Added “Expeditious” to the title of section 4. Within section 4 changed “...on the <i>Case Record Communication Log</i> by the verifier.” to “...within FA.” Also within section 4 added “..., and that the results are subject to change upon the completion of the final review conducted upon the completion of the casework and issuance of the Laboratory Report.” and “...in accordance with the FBI Laboratory Operations Manual <i>Preparing Laboratory Reports and Retaining Records in FA.</i> ” Added “The blind verification will be conducted after the completion of the technical review and verifications and prior to the administrative review.” to section 3.4. Also updated Appendix A.
5	05/03/21	Changed “he/she” and “his/her” to “they” and “their” and made grammatical changes throughout the document. In section 2.1.4 changed “compact disks” to “discs” and in the last bullet of section 2.2.1, changed “photographs” to “images”. In section 3.1 changed “will be used as a guide” to “may be referred to as needed” and removed “all”. In section 3.2.3 changed “examiners and reviewers” to “examiner(s) and reviewer(s).” and removed “agreement with the examination process” and replaced it with “approval”. In the last sentence of the first paragraph in section 4, changed “Technical review and an administrative review” to “Technical and administrative reviews”. In section 4.1 removed “to be” and in the third bullet removed “positive” and added “association”. Updated Appendix B “QDU-15 Abbreviations”.

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**Approval**

Questioned Documents -  
Unit Chief

Date: 04/30/2021

Questioned Documents -  
Technical Leader

Date: 04/30/2021

Footwear/Tire Tread -  
Technical Leader

Date: 04/30/2021

**QA Approval**

Quality Manager -

Date: 04/30/2021

**Appendix A: *QDU-12 LIMS Case Review Evaluation Sheet***

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**Appendix B: *QDU – 15 Abbreviations***

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**Appendix B: QDU – 15 Abbreviations (continued)**

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**Appendix B: *ODU – 15 Abbreviations (continued)***  
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